

Government agrees measures with telecoms companies to support vulnerable consumers through COVID-19

Following constructive discussions with the Digital Secretary and Ofcom, the UK's major telecommunications providers have today agreed a set of important commitments to support and protect vulnerable consumers and those who may become vulnerable due to circumstances arising from Covid-19.

The UK's major internet service and mobile providers, namely BT/EE, Openreach, Virgin Media, Sky, TalkTalk, O2, Vodafone, Three, Hyperoptic, Gigaclear, and KCOM have all agreed the following commitments, effective immediately:

- All providers have committed to working with customers who find it difficult to pay their bill as a result of Covid-19 to ensure that they are treated fairly and appropriately supported.
- All providers will remove all data allowance caps on all current fixed broadband services.
- All providers have agreed to offer some new, generous mobile and landline packages to ensure people are connected and the most vulnerable continue to be supported. For example, some of these packages include data boosts at low prices and free calls from their landline or mobile.
- All providers will ensure that vulnerable customers or those self-isolating receive alternative methods of communication wherever possible if priority repairs to fixed broadband and landlines cannot be carried out.

These commitments are in addition to a range of supportive measures offered by the individual providers to their customers affected by circumstances arising from Covid-19.

Digital Secretary Oliver Dowden said:

It's fantastic to see mobile and broadband providers pulling together to do their bit for the national effort by helping customers, particularly the most vulnerable, who may be struggling with bills at this difficult time.

It is essential that people stay at home to protect the NHS and

save lives. This package helps people to stay connected whilst they stay home.

Melanie Dawes, CEO of Ofcom said:

We recognise providers are dealing with unprecedented challenges at the moment. So we welcome them stepping up to protect vulnerable customers, at a time when keeping in touch with our friends and families has never been more important. We'll continue to work with Government and industry to help make sure people stay connected.

Marc Allera, CEO of BT's Consumer division said:

The service and connectivity that BT provides are more critical today than they ever have been in our lifetime. During this national and global crisis, our priorities are the safety of our colleagues and ensuring that our customers, particularly those that are vulnerable, stay connected. Within the last week or so we focused on implementing a range of initiatives and additional services for our most vulnerable customers and we are pleased to support these sector-wide commitments.

None of this happens without the dedication of our brilliant teams. I'm particularly grateful to our committed contact centre colleagues who are fielding unprecedented call volumes and helping our customers stay connected.

Clive Selley, CEO of Openreach said:

With connections to more than 24 million customer premises across the UK, we know our network is critical. We'll do everything we can to keep people connected while prioritising our support for critical public services, vulnerable customers and those without a working line.

Thankfully a large amount of the work we do – including fixing faults, adding capacity and building faster, more reliable full fibre networks – can be completed outside, so you'll still see Openreach engineers working to maintain service across the UK.

Lutz Schüler, CEO of Virgin Media said:

In these unprecedented times we know how important connectivity is to people's lives. Alongside the many other steps we're already

taking, we're committed to helping our most vulnerable customers and ensuring they are supported as much as possible as we work tirelessly to keep the country connected.

Stephen van Rooyen, EVP & CEO, U.K. & Europe, Sky, said:

There has never been a more important time for people to stay connected. We will play our part to help everyone stay in contact with their loved ones and to ensure vulnerable people can access the help and information they need.

Tristia Harrison, CEO of TalkTalk, said:

At this time of uncertainty across the country, nobody should have to worry about connection to friends and loved ones. That's why TalkTalk is dedicated to treating customers – whether consumers or businesses – with fairness and compassion, so they don't fear losing service if current circumstances mean they're struggling financially. We have also established a priority contact line for vulnerable customers, so they can reach us when they need.

At a time where other bills may be going up, TalkTalk will not be adding inflation to standard bills from 1st April. And while people may need to use more landline calls, they will never pay over our low and fixed price package so that there are no nasty surprises.

It's more important than ever that we all work together to keep Britain connected, and TalkTalk is proud to play our part as a provider of this critical national service.

Mark Evans, CEO of Telefonica UK (O2), said:

I'm delighted to see the industry and government working together to help the UK at this critical time. At O2 we have long-established policies in place to support our customers, and right now, digital connectivity is more important than ever as we connect our customers to vital services and their loved ones.

Nick Jeffery, CEO of Vodafone UK said:

Whether you are at home, working from home or a key worker, Vodafone is committed to keeping the UK connected. We know that our technology is making a real difference in helping people through this health crisis. We are committed to supporting those customers vulnerable to COVID-19, enabling them to keep in contact with friends and family and live their lives as best as possible. We are

here for them.

Robert Finnegan, CEO of Three said:

We take our responsibility to keep our customers connected during this time very seriously and are providing the government with our full support where possible. I am committed to ensuring that all of our customers are treated fairly and that they are supported by Three.

Dana Tobak CBE, CEO of Hyperoptic said:

Staying connected in these unprecedented times is of crucial importance to society. Our engineers are showing great commitment to provide an essential service to society and value the support and understanding they are receiving from members of the public. We are pleased to commit to these measures to help support the most vulnerable members of society, who must of course take priority in these circumstances.

Gareth Williams, CEO of Gigaclear said:

Gigaclear are proud to be playing a vital role in building and maintaining the UK's digital infrastructure. We are working with our industry partners to support both our residential and business customers who are relying on our service now more than ever. In addition to the measures set out here, we are increasing the speeds of our customers currently on 30mbps products, as well as prioritising vulnerable customers who make themselves known to us.

Dale Raneberg, CEO of KCOM said:

As a provider of services people are relying on now more than ever, we are committed to keeping our customers connected throughout Covid-19 and determined in particular to support and protect vulnerable consumers and those who may become vulnerable as a result of it.

We acted quickly to lift data caps and to provide reassurance that we will assist customers facing financial pressure over the period ahead to ensure they continue to have access to essential communications services.

We are pleased to join with industry colleagues in putting in place the additional measures announced today and to back the Government's wider efforts to address this issue we now all face.